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Mindful Feelings Graph: How It Works
Lesson & Worksheet

Welcome! The **Mindful Feelings Graph (MFG)** is designed to help you pinpoint where you are in the moment on two scales: how you are *feeling*, and how *mindful* you are. Dr. S. Colby Peters developed the Graph based on the research of Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett, as well as various models of mindfulness. When you can figure out where you are in terms of **feelings** and **mindfulness**, you can make conscious choices about how to either continue what you are doing or make adjustments to your behavior so you can feel better. You can also see a brief video on the Mindful Feelings Graph that covers a lot of the following introductory information.

What are feelings?

First, let's talk about feelings. In this context, feelings are different from emotions. Feelings are our bodies' physical response to an experience inside or outside of us, and emotions are our cognitive interpretation of our feelings and experience. Feelings have two dimensions: 1) *affect*, which is how good or bad we feel, and 2) *valence*, which is how aroused or calm we feel.

Experience ➡ **Feelings** *Affect + Valence* ➡ **Emotion Word**

If you'd like to learn more about how we create emotions, check out the Human Systems Virtual Emotion Wheel, which includes a brief lesson on emotion creation, as well as tips on how to use your emotions to make positive changes in behavior and perspective.

What is mindfulness?

There are so many definitions of mindfulness. Based on my research and personal experience, here is one that I like to use:

Mindfulness: *The practice of becoming aware of our thoughts, feelings and environment in a non-judgmental way so that we can make conscious choices about how to be.*

Have you ever been driving and suddenly realized that you don't remember the last 20 miles at all? That's probably because you were in your thinking, or *ego mind*. You might have been creating a grocery list, or thinking about a work problem, or having a conversation with somebody in your head. When you realize that you don't remember the last 20 miles because you were in your ego mind, you are being mindful – you became aware that you were deep in your thinking mind and were not noticing your body and/or environment.

When we are being mindful, we might notice:

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- Whether we are in our thinking mind, or *ego mind*.
- What we are thinking and feeling.
- Our body and how it feels.
- What are senses our telling us – taste, touch, sound, sight, smell, and intuition.

Keep in mind that noticing things, or being mindful, is a non-judgmental, non-directive process. We do not become mindful so that we can berate ourselves for not being mindful or push ourselves to do something different. *Instead, we become aware so that we can have more choices about how we want to be.*

The Feelings Scale

We can use the MFG to help us pinpoint 1) *how we feel*, including our *affect* (how good or bad we feel) and our *valence* (how aroused or calm we are) and 2) how mindful we are.

The vertical axis represents our feelings (affect and valence). The middle point is neutral affect and valence. Anything above the middle is positive affect, and the higher up you go, the higher your valence. Anything below the middle point is negative affect, and the farther down you go, the higher your valence.

### Human Systems Feelings Scale
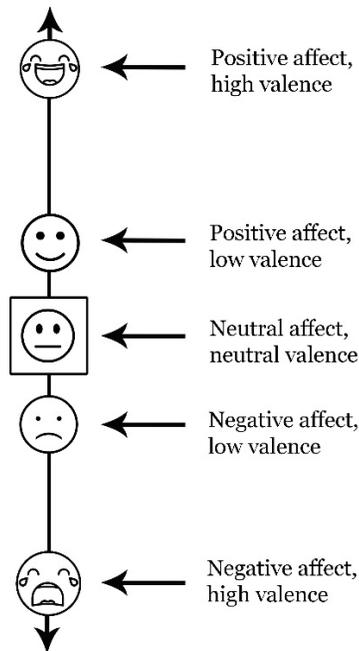
The Mindfulness Scale

The horizontal axis represents our mindfulness. On the left side, we are in our thinking, or ego minds. On the right side, we are fully mindful, aware of ourselves and our environment. In the middle, we are aware that we have a body. Just to be clear, in this context, *ego* is not necessarily a bad thing – our ego helps us make decisions, motivates us, and plans. Our ego can be very useful, we just want to be able to have choices about when to be egoic and when to be mindful.

Human Systems
Mindfulness Scale
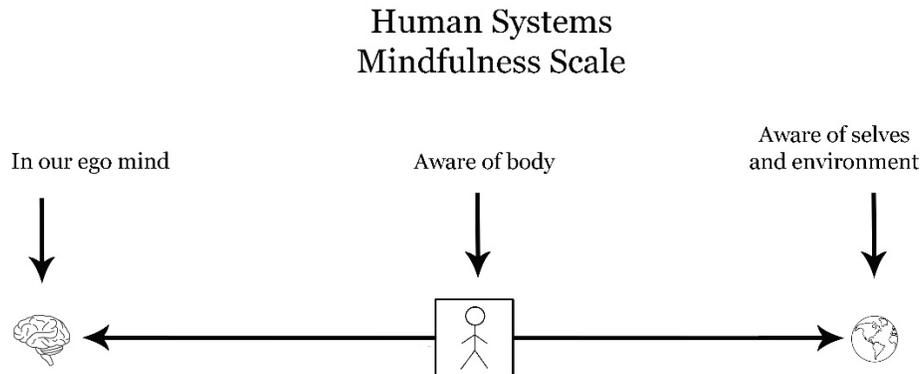
The Mindful Feelings Graph

So now, let's put our **Feelings Scale** and our **Mindfulness Scale** together to make the **Mindful Feelings Graph (MFG)**.
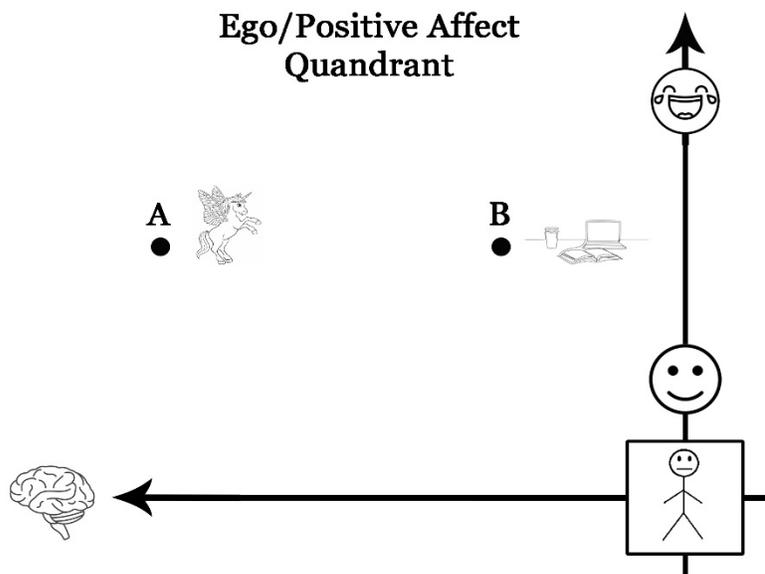
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Mindful Feelings Graph
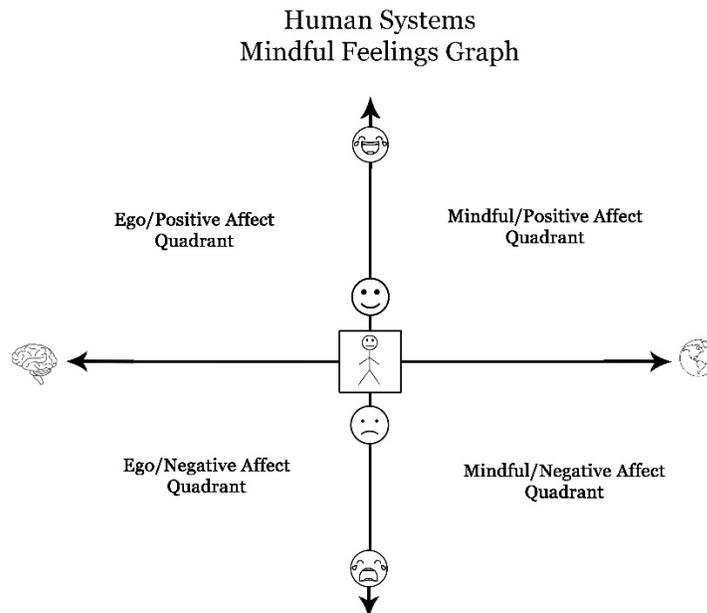
Each quadrant serves a special purpose in our lives, so let's take a look at when and why we might use each one.

Ego/Positive Affect Quadrant

When I (Dr. Peters) was creating this lesson and worksheet, I was in the *Ego/Positive Affect Quadrant*. I was deep in my thinking mind, unaware of my surroundings, happily typing away and arranging stick figures, smiley faces, and arrows in Photoshop. When you are enjoying yourself while creating something (scenario B), you are probably in this quadrant. You may also be having a positive visualization or fantasy, like getting your flying unicorn ready for an adventure across a rainbow bridge (scenario A). In scenario B, you are going to be closer to the midpoint of the mindfulness scale, and in scenario A, you and your unicorn are going to be way out to the left. In scenario B, you may still be somewhat aware of your body as you feel your fingers hit the keyboard, and you take sips of water or coffee. In scenario A, you are fully in your own fantasy world and completely unaware of the physical realm. If not, please contact me because I'd love to meet a unicorn.

Depending on how excited you are to be working on your project or going on an adventure with your unicorn, you may be higher or lower in the quadrant. If the project happens to be something you really love and you are collaborating with a great team, you might be a bit higher, as compared to a routine project. If your favorite unicorn is not available for your adventure, perhaps you'd be a bit less excited, and lower on the feelings scale.

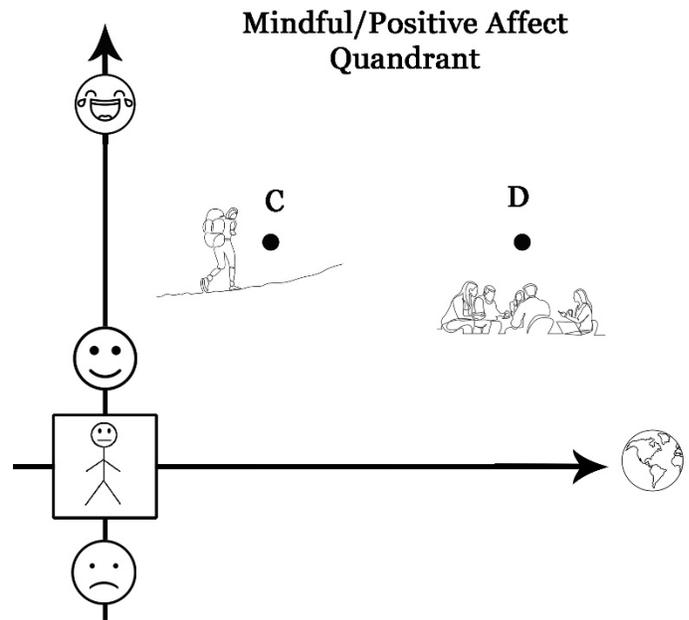### Mindful/Positive Affect Quadrant

When I am doing yoga or gardening, I am generally in the *Mindful/Positive Affect Quadrant*. I am aware of my body and interacting with my environment, and I am not thinking about (or I'm trying not to think about) anything else except what I am feeling and sensing at that very

moment. If I am meditating, I am being mindful when I note disruptions, such as sounds, sensations, or thoughts, and allow them to float into one side of my brain and out the other. If you are being mindful, you are fully immersed in whatever you are doing. If you are washing the dishes, you are noticing the way the water and soap feel on your hands, the clinking sounds the dishes make when they go in the dishwasher, the sound of the garbage disposal. If you are talking to a friend, you are listening carefully to what they are saying, so that you could accurately summarize what they said when they are finished. You might be in this quadrant if you are taking a hike through nature on your own (scenario C); or in a group, listening carefully to a friend telling all of you an interesting story (scenario D). In scenario C, you might be more to the left, because you are on your own and could easily slip into your thinking mind. In scenario D, you might be more to the right because you are listening to the story, aware of your own reactions, and paying attention to other people's reactions as well.

Mindful/Negative Affect Quadrant
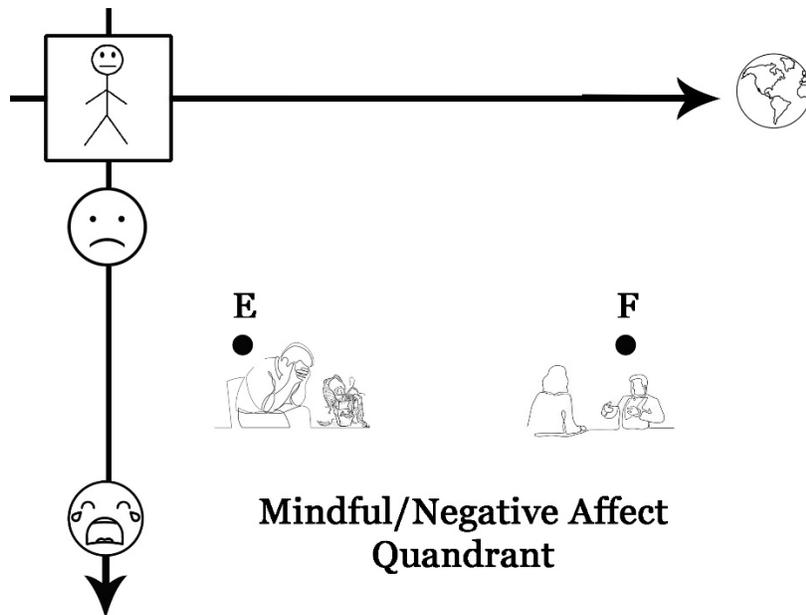
If I am in the *Mindful/Negative Affect Quadrant*, then maybe I am grieving the loss of a loved one (scenario E), or I might be listening to somebody give me negative feedback (scenario F). In scenario E, I may be more to the left on the mindful scale because in addition to being aware of how sad I am, I may be dipping in and out of memories I had that involve my loved one. In scenario F, I am probably more to the right because I am listening

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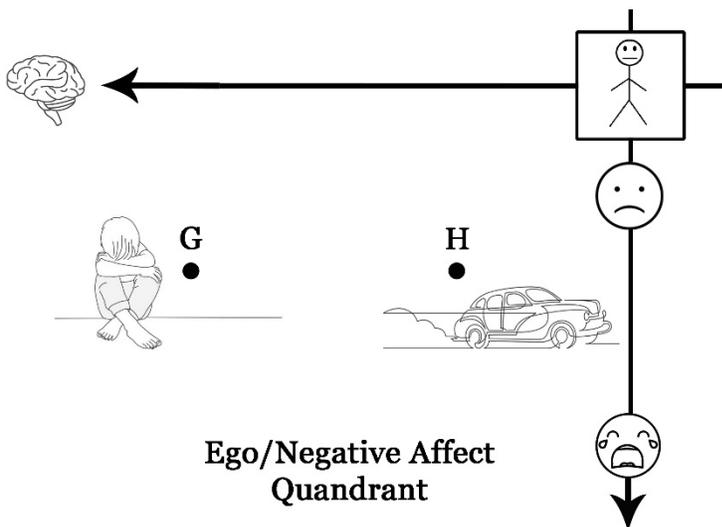www.humansystems.co

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to what the person is saying, especially if there are other people present in whose reactions I am interested.

Depending on the person who is giving the feedback and what the content is in scenario E, I might feel more or less stressed – be higher or lower on the feelings scale. If the loved one in scenario F is my houseplant, I will probably feel less distressed than if the loved one is a person I was very close to. Just to be clear, though, I have several houseplants I love and I say hello to them every day.

When you are mindful and feeling bad, you are aware of how you feel, why you feel that way, how your body is feeling, and what is happening around you. This can be VERY hard to do because it means we are fully experiencing our own pain, whether it's physical or emotional. Human beings don't like to be uncomfortable – we have lots of ways to avoid being uncomfortable, some of which are excellent short-term solutions (such as using mood-altering chemicals) and some of which are excellent long-term solutions (such as regular exercise, eating well, and connecting with others). One of the most common ways we escape pain is to jump into the fourth quadrant, which we will explore next.

Ego/Negative Affect Quadrant

I think of this quadrant as the "escape/trigger quadrant". I use this quadrant when I am in pain but for whatever reason, I can't fully experience the pain, so I engage my ego and "push through it". On some level, I still feel bad, but I can still think about and do other things. I've spent a lot of time in this quadrant when driving (scenario H) – either because I'm bored, or I'm ruminating on some painful situation for which I have not yet found a solution. I also land in this quadrant if I have an experience that triggers past trauma, and I find myself reliving some painful experience I had as a child (scenario G). If you experience scenario H, you are probably more towards the right, because you have to come back to your senses periodically to change lanes, stop at red lights, etc. In scenario G, you may be more to the left, deep in your child-self and disconnected from current reality.

Ego/Negative Affect Quandrant

G

H

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Moving Between Quadrants

Keep in mind that if you are just starting to practice mindfulness, you may jump to a mindful quadrant for just a few moments, and then land back in an ego quadrant. And it's not the *scenario* that makes you mindful or egoic, it's *how you experience it*. So you could be hiking through Eden, but if you are thinking about what you're going to say to your boss tomorrow, you are not in the Mindful/Positive Affect Quadrant. Similarly, if you have been triggered and are in your child-self, you might become mindful of that and choose to process those emotions right then and there, in which case you would be in the Mindful/Negative Affect Quadrant.

Like so many of the Human Systems tools, the point of the Mindful Feelings Graph is not to come up with an answer, but to explore your experience and broaden your perspective. We have lots of tools you can use along with the Mindful Feelings Graph to help you process experiences around uncomfortable emotions (check out the TEA), and managing conflict (try the Conflict Management Logic Model).

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Mindful Feelings Graph